

UMD Voice



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KLIME KOVACESKI:
Acclaimed Macedonian Chef
Takes On The World

MACEDONIAN CHEF TAKES ON THE WORLD

By Ana Buling, UMD Communications and Public Relations Fellow



Chef Klime Kovaceski has been serving a fiercely loyal and ever-expanding clientele for the past two decades. Educated in Ohrid and Croatia, Kovaceski went on to work in Amsterdam and Miami, eventually becoming ten-year executive chef for a Miami restaurant called Jama, and the owner-chef of a long-running and highly

acclaimed Miami restaurant called Crystal Cafe. Kovaceski is now corporate executive chef at Mez Restaurant in North Carolina, and is working on a book about Eastern European cooking with veteran Miami food critic Lee Klein. In our interview, Kovaceski talks about how his deep Macedonian roots inspire his craft, the lessons he has learned from his impressive clientele, and his many plans for the future.

AB: How has being Macedonian influenced your cooking?

KK: The food culture of one's homeland becomes a flavor memory, and it stays in your subconscious. You know the flavor you are looking for, however indescribable it might be, and when you reach it, people respond to it, because you are cooking with your soul.

AB: How did moving to America challenge or expand your skills?

KK: When I relocated to the states in 1984, I found myself participating in the culinary evolution that was happening here during the eighties and early nineties, due to the explosion of food-related publications, food-related network television shows and general media interest. Living in a great international and competitive city like Miami, I woke up every morning and planned what I needed to do in order to create something fresh and new.

AB: What inspired you to become a chef and attend two culinary schools, one in Ohrid, and the other in Croatia?

KK: Being a musician, I felt it was needed to find something that was equally creative, unpredictable and challenging that I could have as a secure profession, and that is what cooking became for me.

AB: How has being a Macedonian set you apart from other chefs and restaurateurs?

KK: The fact that I was not French, Italian or Spanish, which are all very popular and well known cuisines; I had to be better all across the board in order to attract attention and support.

AB: Why do you think it is that Eastern European cuisine is so rarely explored by other chefs?

KK: I think there are negative connotations that are associated with a country's history with communism, which may bring a fair amount of aversion or avoidance here in a western society.

AB: What can be done to change this and make the food more accessible to mainstream as well as exclusive audiences?

KK: To take the classical dishes and evolve them enough so that they please the mainstream, but also retain their unique and regional originality, for example, my salmon dish, which was inspired by the traditional preparation of Ohridska Pastrmka (Ohrid Lake Trout).

AB: You are planning on publishing a book on Eastern European food in the future; what are some of your favorite Macedonian dishes?

KK: Without naming the obvious and most popular, I prefer anything that has to do with combining three to five ingredients, and none of them being pork.

AB: You keep a "little black book" of customers and clientele; who is a favorite in that book?

KK: Iggy Pop was definitely one of my favorites. When I found my love for the guitar at a young age, he was one, along with others of that time period, which we were listening to back home, so it was great to meet him. Also, he was completely the opposite of the outrageous persona we see on stage.

Instead, I found him to be soft-spoken and very kind.

AB: What is your favorite self-created dish?

KK: I don't have a favorite. It's like asking a father which of his children is a favorite. I like dishes that I create quickly and spontaneously. They are always the ones that become the most widely popular and well liked.

AB: What advice do you have to aspiring chefs?

KK: Of course, don't serve a dish that you wouldn't serve to yourself, but always remember it is not about you. You are there as a servant to culinary fantasies and desires of others.

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